

**To:** Gray, David[gray.david@epa.gov]  
**Cc:** Smith, Paula[Smith.Paula@epa.gov]; Curry, Ron[Curry.Ron@epa.gov]; Coleman, Sam[Coleman.Sam@epa.gov]; Faulk, Libby[Faulk.Libby@epa.gov]  
**From:** Card, Joan  
**Sent:** Fri 8/7/2015 11:55:10 AM  
**Subject:** Re: News Release - Sheriff Order to Close Animas River

We should have some analytical results early today and we will know what the river looks like in Durango with our eyes on the ground there.

Joan Card  
Senior Policy Advisor  
Region 8

Sent from my EPA iPhone

On Aug 7, 2015, at 5:04 AM, Gray, David <gray.david@epa.gov> wrote:

Thanks Paula. I appreciate the update. We are beginning to get several inquiries about possible NM impacts from both elected officials and media. We will continue to closely coordinate with your office.

David

Sent from my iPhone

On Aug 6, 2015, at 11:25 PM, Smith, Paula <Smith.Paula@epa.gov> wrote:

David, Ron and Sam-- here's some of the latest info. Currently have two OSCs in Silverton and Durango, two more arriving tonight as well as our PIO, Libby Faulk. Shaun and our Director of ER Program flying in tomorrow to tour river, EOC, meet with elected officials and potentially conduct a public meeting. Please give a call in the morning if you have any questions or need any further info.

Paula J. Smith  
Director, Office of Communication and Public Involvement  
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From: Sarah Jacobson [<mailto:Sarah.Jacobson@co.laplata.co.us>]  
Sent: Thursday, August 6, 2015 4:19 PM  
To: [rcorkish@gmail.com](mailto:rcorkish@gmail.com)<<mailto:rcorkish@gmail.com>>; Flannery O'Neil  
<[foneil@sjbhd.org](mailto:foneil@sjbhd.org)<<mailto:foneil@sjbhd.org>>>  
Subject: News Release - Sheriff Order to Close Animas River

Effective Thursday, August 6, 2015 at 3:00 p.m., La Plata County Sheriff Sean Smith issued an order pursuant to CRS 33-13-111 and 112, closing the Animas River to all watercraft including canoes, kayaks, tubes, rafts and other flotation devices from the north County line (San Juan County, Colorado) to the south County line (at the Colorado/New Mexico State line) until further notice. Furthermore, all such watercraft must be removed from the Animas River within the locations cited above.

"This decision was made in the interest of public health after consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Colorado Department of Health and Environment, San Juan Basin Health Department and representatives of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe," advised Sheriff Sean Smith. "This Order shall remain in effect until it is determined that the river is safe. EPA test results of the Animas River are expected within 24-48 hours, and the Order will be re-evaluated at that time."

The City of Durango and La Plata County Sheriff's Office are posting notices along the Animas River to notify citizens.

A Call Center has been set up for the public at 970-385-8700. As additional information is received, it will be posted to the La Plata County website at <http://www.co.laplata.co.us/emergency>, San Juan Basin Health Department's Website at [www.sjbhd.org](http://www.sjbhd.org)<<http://www.sjbhd.org>>, La Plata County Government Facebook and San Juan Basin Health Department Facebook.

From: Mylott, Richard  
Sent: Thursday, August 06, 2015 7:09 PM  
To: '[Eric.M.Johnson@thomsonreuters.com](mailto:Eric.M.Johnson@thomsonreuters.com)'  
Subject: RE: statement on mine plug

Steps have been taken to secure drinking water and the county is advising people to avoid recreational contact with the river as a precaution. While those measures put us

in a good place in terms of human health and exposure, we will be assessing water quality over the next several days, including any impacts to fish and aquatic life.

From:

[Eric.M.Johnson@thomsonreuters.com](mailto:Eric.M.Johnson@thomsonreuters.com)<<mailto:Eric.M.Johnson@thomsonreuters.com>>  
[<mailto:Eric.M.Johnson@thomsonreuters.com>]

Sent: Thursday, August 06, 2015 6:58 PM

To: Mylott, Richard

Subject: RE: statement on mine plug

Is this dangerous to people? Is this true:

Don Cooper, emergency manager in San Juan County, said people should not panic because the EPA had told the county the spill would not harm people and that the primary pollutants were iron and zinc.

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#### EPA Statement on Gold King Mine Release—August 6

On August 5, an EPA team working to investigate and address contamination at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County, Colo. unexpectedly triggered a large release of mine waste water into the upper portions of Cement Creek. Initial estimates are that the release contained approximately 1M gallons of water that was held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal. There were several workers at the site at the time of the breach, all were unharmed.

Following the release, the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment notified water users downstream so they could take appropriate steps to turn off intakes until the contaminated water passes.

The primary environmental concern is the pulse of contaminated water containing sediment and metals flowing as an orange-colored discharge downstream through Cement Creek and into the Animas River. The water associated with the release is obvious and highly discolored. As a precaution, EPA recommends that recreational users of the Animas River avoid contact with or use of the river until the pulse of mine water passes. Over the next several days, EPA teams will be sampling and investigating downstream locations to confirm that the release has passed and poses no additional concerns for aquatic life or water users. EPA will also be assessing damage near the mine portal and any residual releases of water at the mine site.

EPA's team was working with heavy equipment to secure and consolidate a safe way to enter the mine and access contaminated water when the breach occurred. The project was intended to pump and treat the water and reduce metals pollution flowing out of the mine into the Cement Creek watershed.

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In answer to the question -How did this incident occur? EPA's cleanup team was working with heavy equipment to secure and consolidate an entrance to the mine and access a pool of contaminated water. The project was intended to pump and treat the

water and reduce metals pollution flowing out of the mine into the Cement Creek watershed. The team had no indication of the presence of the large volume of water under pressure, which was held behind roughly 15 feet of loosely consolidated dirt.

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#### EPA Statement- Aug 5

This morning at approximately 10:30 am, an EPA and State Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety team working to investigate and address contamination at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County, Colo. unexpectedly triggered a large release of mine waste water into the upper portions of Cement Creek. Initial estimates are that the release contained approximately 1M gallons of water that was held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal. There were several workers at the site at the time of the breach, all were unharmed.

The primary environmental concern is the pulse of contaminated water containing sediment and metals flowing as an orange-colored discharge downstream through Cement Creek and into the Animas River.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment has notified water users downstream of the release so they can take appropriate steps to turn off intakes until the contaminated water passes. The Town of Silverton does not take water out of the affected portions of Cement Creek. Due to current and longstanding water quality impairment associated with heavy metals there are no fish populations in the Cement Creek watershed and populations in the Animas River have historically been impaired for several miles downstream of Silverton. Over the next several days, EPA teams will be sampling and investigating downstream locations to confirm that the release has passed and poses no additional concerns for aquatic life or water users.

“This unfortunate incident underscores the very reason EPA and the State of Colorado are focused on addressing the environmental risks at abandoned mine sites,” said David Ostrander, director of EPA’s emergency response program in Denver. “We are thankful that the personnel working on this mine cleanup project were unharmed. EPA will be assessing downstream conditions to ensure any impacts and concerns are addressed, as necessary.”

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